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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007399

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SUBJECT: LATEST GOF THINKING ON MEHLIS REPORT, SYRIA/LEBANON

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary: On October 28, Herve Besancenot, the MFA's DAS-equivalent for Egypt/Levant, offered latest French thinking on the Mehlis report and other related issues. Besancenot said France was focused on gaining unanimity for a draft resolution in the Security Council, and was willing to compromise on certain issues in order to protect French redlines, such as invoking Chapter VII and threatening sanctions. He emphasized that FM Douste-Blazy would only go to the UN on October 31 if agreement on a text had been reached. In regards to both the Mehlis and Larsen reports, Besancenot said it was critically important for future reports to stay within their mandates and avoid bringing in other issues, even if they were linked in reality. Focusing exclusively on their respective mandates was essential to maintaining their credibility, said Besancenot. End summary.

THE MEHLIS REPORT

12. (C) Poloff raised President Chirac's October 27 statement at the informal European Summit at Hampton Roads in which he said he was in favor of an "international tribunal" in accordance with what he termed Saad Hariri's wishes. (Note: It was later reported as Chirac "calling" for an international tribunal. End note) Besancenot said President Chirac had clearly stated that even if he believed an international tribunal was a good idea, France would respond to the Lebanese government's wishes. France was ready to contribute in any way necessary, but would follow Lebanon's lead regarding the trial of those involved in PM Hariri's assassination.

13. (C) Besancenot also offered his take on the draft UNSCR to respond to the Mehlis report. He said France's firm conviction was that the resolution should be unanimous; to settle for a majority would harm international efforts to respond to the Mehlis report. He said he understood the USG argument that UNSCR 1559 had passed with a majority instead of unanimity, but he said the GOF regretted in that case that unanimity had not been achieved. In order to reach unanimity, France was willing to be flexible on some issues, such as a call on Syria to cease all interference in Lebanon and the invoking of the terrorist clause, in order to protect its redlines: invoking Chapter VII (which Besancenot called "indispensable") and the threat of sanctions. These two concepts were absolutely key for any resolution, said Besancenot. However, he said France would focus on abiding by strict judicial processes, to avoid charges that sanctions against individuals would be levied for political reasons. Syria was trying its hardest to divide the Security Council, said Besancenot, and it was therefore essential that the U.S. and France work towards unanimity within the council.

14. (C) The key was the actual Mehlis report, said Besancenot. It is accepted by all countries, including those in the Arab world. Given its credibility, the international community should strictly follow the report's recommendations and not go any further, again to avoid charges of political opportunism. It was for this reason, said Besancenot, that France would not insist on including in the draft resolution a clause that called on Syria to cease all interference in Lebanon. This was related to the Mehlis report, but not a focus of it. France had no interest in a "melting pot" resolution, either for the Mehlis report or in reaction to the Larsen report, said Besancenot. The GOF believed it was not sellable to Arab countries or to the UNSC. Given the success up to this point of the Mehlis report, it would be counter-productive to overreach, said Besancenot. France was very willing for Mehlis to continue his work (and even to give him an extension to the December deadline), in order that he might "transform suspicion into proof," said Besancenot.

THE LARSEN REPORT

15. (C) Turning to the latest report from UN Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen regarding compliance with UNSCR 1559, Besancenot said Larsen was well within his mandate to focus on the PFLP and Hezbollah as two organizations that continue to hold

weaponry in defiance of 1559. Returning to a point he made on the Mehlis report, Besancenot emphasized that Larsen should keep to the strict confines of the mandate. It was not useful, said Besancenot, to raise the presence of Palestinian extremist groups in Damascus or Syrian-Iraqi border issues, because to do so would diminish the report's credibility and also diminish the credibility of any subsequent resolutions.

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